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## REPORT ON THE EIGHTH NATIONAL FOREIGN TRADE CONVENTION

The Eighth National Foreign Trade Convention met at Cleveland, Ohio, May 4th to 7th, 1921. (See the article by Professor Alfred Coester on "The Seventh National Foreign Trade Convention and Its Relation to the Teaching of Spanish" in *HISPANIA* of November, 1920, for a report on the meeting last year.) The present writer was appointed by President John D. Fitz-Gerald to represent the American Association of Teachers of Spanish at the May meeting of the convention. The convention was well attended, and was intensely interesting and informative. To quote from the *Final Declaration* of the convention :

Approximately 1,200 delegates were registered, almost all of whom were in actual attendance. They came from nearly every state in the Union, and represented hundreds of different individuals, firms or corporations interested in foreign trade, as well as educational institutions, banks, commercial and agricultural associations, railroad and steamship companies. Many of them were connected with American enterprises in other lands. American Chambers of Commerce and other commercial organizations in the Far East, South America, and Europe were represented.

The general theme of the Convention was "American Foreign Trade and Its Present Problems." Five general sessions were held, at which various phases of this theme were ably presented. There were also eleven group sessions at which methods and means of meeting the immediate problems were considered.

Of the group sessions, two are of special interest to teachers of Spanish. The topic of the first was "Commercial Education for Foreign Trade." The two papers read at this group meeting were entitled "Fundamentals in Foreign Trade Education," and "Means of Getting an International Viewpoint in Foreign Trade Education." Both papers dealt with the necessity of studying foreign languages, and one speaker wanted the study of foreign languages to begin early, at least in the junior high school, and to be made compulsory. But what is more significant for teachers of foreign languages was the declaration that not only the representatives of American business who go abroad must know the language, customs, and psychology of the country to which they are sent, but that the United States must learn to look at the world from an international point of view; that the "man in the street" must recognize that good times and bad times are due in part to the success or failure of his country's foreign trade;

and that one of the best ways to secure that point of view for the country as a whole is to teach foreign languages. Our psychological insularity and lack of training in foreign languages were contrasted to those of the more progressive nations of Europe. While they were not regarded as models, they do show that we might improve our educational system. The general sentiment of the group meeting regarding foreign languages seemed to be that French and Spanish should be compulsory the country over. Another thought clearly indicated at the meeting was the necessity for so reorganizing the educational system of this country that a more nearly world-wide view of peoples and of events might be taught. How to attain this international point of view, how to reorganize the educational system so as to achieve it—these questions were not answered and were only slightly discussed. That we should have more study of foreign language, and that French and Spanish should be made compulsory seems to have been the extent of the thinking on the matter. The present writer does not wish to do more now than call attention to the powerful impetus which the National Foreign Trade Convention could give the study of Spanish, say, were it furnished with a definite program and assured of the coöperation of the teachers of Spanish of the country. This would seem to be an opportunity to do the cause of teaching foreign languages a real service.

Just here a word of warning should be given. If the present writer judged accurately the situation at this meeting, there is room for much missionary work among the teachers of foreign trade courses in our universities and colleges. Many of these men do not seem to sense the necessity of knowing the foreign language and the psychology of the peoples with whom we trade. Some of them, like some of us, are greatly interested in the methodology of their courses. Men who take such an attitude will not be enthusiastic in their coöperation with a plan to promote the study of foreign languages in this country. They do not fully appreciate the need for it, concentrated as they seem to be on their own immediate courses.

The second group meeting of interest to teachers of Spanish was called "Inter-American Trade Relations." At this session Dr. Guillermo A. Sherwell, of the Inter-American High Commission, and a member of the Executive Council of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish, discussed "The Customer and the Market." He indicated many mistaken opinions held by the average American

about Spanish-Americans and Spanish America. One of his main points was that we must learn to know the people to the south of us if we are to deal with them successfully, and that to know them we must know their language and customs. He particularly emphasized the fact that the various Spanish-speaking countries vary in the characteristics of the population as well as in climate, a fact not always taken into consideration by teachers of Spanish.

Mr. Will A. Peairs presented a paper on conditions in Mexico, and dwelt also on the matter of exchange of professors and students between Mexico and the United States. As some will recall, Mr. Peairs is chairman of the Mexican-American Scholarship Foundation Committee for the United States. According to Mr. Peairs:

The Mexican-American Scholarship Foundation is absolutely non-sectarian, non-political, and non-partisan. As organized it will remain in force no matter who fills the executive chair in Washington or who is President of Mexico. It is arranged to be perpetual, for results can not come quickly; it is the work of generations yet to come.

The plan if successful will accomplish three objects, namely:

- 1st. Through education to create a better understanding and finally form idealistic relations.
- 2nd. Through education and better understanding to increase the commercial exchange between the two republics.
- 3rd. Through education, better understanding and commercial relations to create on our southern border the same situation as exists on the north, doing away with the tremendous standing army which costs millions of dollars to maintain.

The attitude of the President of Mexico toward the Foundation is very cordial. The following letter from President Obregon to Mr. Peairs is dated April 12, 1921.

Mr. Will A. Peairs,  
Des Moines, Iowa.

Referring to your valued favor of April 11, 1921, in which you express your ideas of an exchange of scholarships for students and professors between Mexico and the United States, I take pleasure in informing you that I have looked carefully into these plans and find them most interesting for the development of a better understanding between the United States and Mexico, and for the benefit of culture in general.

Desiring to encourage your effort, I wish to assure you of the Mexican Government's active coöperation. We will pay the fare to destination of all Mexican students going to the United States.

We will also issue passes for your representative to visit the different sections of the republic to assist in the selection of the students.

We also request that you select twelve professors from your universities

to come to Mexico to study Archeology, Spanish, Geology, Mexican History, etc. To these twelve we will pay their fare from the border and will authorize for each a sum of 2,000 pesos annually.

The Mexican Government will authorize all of these privileges in exchange for the scholarships which the universities of the United States will give to our students. We will work in complete harmony with the committee that has been formed in furtherance of this plan outlined in your letter.

To the business world assembled in Cleveland, Ohio, please say:

"In making the foregoing offers I am happy to inform you that the Government under my charge is prepared to extend every class of guarantee to business men who desire to establish themselves among us, granting them all possible assistance in accordance with our legislation, such as the exemption of duties on materials of construction, machines, etc., in keeping with the contract embodied in each case."

I have the pleasure of signing myself,

Your obedient servant,

A. OBREGON, *President.*

Mr. Peairs states that some thirty-five colleges and universities have signified their willingness to grant scholarships to Mexican students coming to this country. Those interested may obtain information of Mr. Will A. Peairs, 3125 Kingman, Des Moines, Iowa.

The "Final Declaration" of the Convention has the following paragraph, entitled "Foreign Trade Education."

Scientific educational training is as essential for our business as for our official representatives. It should equip them with accurate and practical knowledge of foreign markets and languages, as well as a knowledge of the economic, social, and political conditions prevailing in other lands. The exchange of scholarships, already established in several countries, is a most helpful means to this end, and should be widely encouraged.

This official statement of the attitude of the Convention should encourage the American Association of Teachers of Spanish to place a representative on the program of the Group Session on Foreign Trade Education at the next meeting of the Convention. Two reasons for making this suggestion are: the fact that Spanish is one of the principal languages used in foreign trade by American business men, and that members of the National Foreign Trade Convention should know that the American Association of Teachers of Spanish is a national organization devoted to the improvement of the teaching of Spanish language, literature, and customs, which can and will cooperate with the National Foreign Trade Convention in so far as Spanish and Spanish America are concerned.

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